

## Christmas Fund Gifts Provided...

The generous gifts of UCC congregations and individuals to the Christmas Fund enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance Program to provide some form of Ministerial Assistance to approximately 1,600 persons during 2009:

- Monthly pension supplementation is provided to 450 persons. These gifts total \$101,400 per month (\$1,216,800 per year). A significant part of the annual total of \$1,216,800 comes from the Christmas Fund.
- Emergency Grants have been provided to 44 individuals and families, totaling \$61,716 in the first eight months of 2009.
- Quarterly health premium supplementation is provided to 294 families, totaling \$165,200 per quarter. All of the funding for health premium supplementation is derived from the Christmas Fund.
- Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks will be sent to approximately 900 persons in 2009. Of those who will receive checks, 20 are over 100 years of age. The oldest person is 107. One person has received Christmas checks continuously since 1976. The 900 gifts total \$270,000.

(These statistics reflect activity as of August 31, 2009.

Please log on to the Christmas Fund web site at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org) for updated information.)



Gertrude A. Grant

At the age of two months, Gertrude A. Grant was already an orphan. Her father had died of diabetes shortly before she was born, and her mother succumbed to pneumonia when Gertrude – her fifth child – was an infant. Gertrude's sisters were placed in a Roman Catholic orphanage in Des Plaines, Illinois, but the orphanage was not equipped to take in a baby and so she spent the first seven years of her life being cared for by her grandfather. When her grandfather became very ill, Gertrude was taken to the orphanage, where she remained until she legally became an adult at age 18.

After leaving the orphanage in 1938, Gertrude held several jobs before becoming apprenticed to a diamond distributor in Chicago. But when World War II erupted in Europe and diamond exports ceased, she changed career plans, becoming a dental assistant.

It was around that time that a friend invited Gertrude to the First Congregational Church of Des Plaines. There, she discovered a spiritual home and met the man who would become her husband. Ernest Clarence Grant was a student minister from Chicago Theological Seminary, working with children and youth. The couple married in 1944.

Ernest's first call following ordination took them to Minneapolis, Minnesota where, over a two-year period, he helped several small churches merge to become the Forest Heights Congregational Church. Their next two churches were also in Michigan: in Upper Peninsula Hancock, and Dearborn, which Gertrude says was a "working class community." Some church members were employed by what was then the largest automobile assembly plant in the world.

Then, in the mid-1960s, the Grants returned to their roots when Ernest was called back to Des Plaines as associate minister of First Congregational. Gertrude found her own calling, founding a women's support group in the church. They remained until Ernest's retirement at the end of 1980.

Not long before Ernest retired, the Grants vacationed in Arizona and realized that it was both beautiful and affordable on a pension income. They settled in Green Valley, about 30 miles south of Tucson. Ernest continued to serve in interim positions until his health no longer permitted it. He died in 1995.

Gertrude still calls Green Valley home and is active in local computer and photography clubs. She is close to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Over the years, Gertrude has undergone six hip surgeries. Then last year, as she was walking through a parking lot, a car backed into her. As a result of the accident, she required an extended period of physical therapy to realign her back, hips and pelvis. "It has taken much time to get all of that working together again," she says, "but I am much improved and continue to exercise so I will be able to heal altogether." The pension supplementation received from the Christmas Fund has helped with the medical bills incurred.

The Grants promoted the Christmas Fund throughout Ernest's ministry, "back when it was still known as 'Veterans of the Cross,'" says Gertrude. "Our congregations always recognized the importance of [the Offering] and were interested in giving."

Now, as a recipient, she expresses thanks "to the United Church Board [for Ministerial Assistance] and donors and to all those instrumental in looking after annuitants."

Looking back on a life that started out with many difficulties, Gertrude concludes, "I really have had a wonderful life," adding, "someone has really looked out for me."

The Third Sunday of Advent  
December 13, 2009

